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AUTHOR	Connell, Jack; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The product of an Ad-Hoc Committee formed to assess the future of the Rennselaerville primary school in Rensselaerville, New York, this document describes the way in which a small school has developed a "partnership" agreement with the larger Greenesville School District and has managed to keep its primary grades operative in the face of consolidation. Specifically, this report considers the pros and cons of total consolidation in terms of: enrollment factors, boundaries, economic factors, the Rensselaerville tax base, educational values, the community context, and the historical perspective. Designed to replace the undesirable climate of uncertainty currently felt in Rensselaerville, the Committee's recommendations represent a procedural approach which it feels the School Board should embrace, suggesting the following: the community should assume that no real consideration, formal or informal, has been given to closing the school and the Board should demonstrate this by reacting to this report; if and when the Board determines the school's be re-evaluated, it should call a public meeting to consider the matter; at such a meeting, the task team should present a framework of information spelling out specific options and taking into account enrollment, boundaries, economic factors, educational values, and community factors; based upon reactions at the meeting and future considerations, the task team should define the decision framework; and once a decision is reached, it must be publicly announced with full justification. (JC)

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THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN THE RENSSELAERVILLE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Submitted to: The Board of Education
Greenville Central School District

By: The Ad-Hoc Committee on Considerations Affecting the Future of the School

Date: February 28, 1977

EC 010 281

These are human-sized institutions where all the significant actors--children and adults--are within reach. The manageable dimensions of small schools are their most significant features, since they tend to reduce the sense of powerlessness and alienation of the children attending them. I am not such a romantic that I believe small schools to be inherently marvelous. I have seen some bad ones, with mean-spirited teachers, poor organization, and little to excite children; but the important thing is that small institutions have a potential for certain kinds of relationships among children and their community.

--Marvin Hoffman
New Hampshire Teacher

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INTRODUCTION

This document transmits to you the findings and recommendations of the Ad-Hoc Committee which has considered the future of education in the Rensselaerville primary school. It is the result of individual and small group research, several committee sessions, and a publicized open meeting at which all persons within the district were encouraged to voice their feelings about the school.

A second part of our presentation is an 8-minute slide-tape show prepared to give people not familiar with the school a sense of its activity.

We respectfully call attention to our first recommendation. Our earnest hope is that the Board of Education will respond and develop a clear stated procedure to be followed in the event that any change in the school's present status is to be considered.

We appreciate your encouragement of our inquiry. We are especially pleased by the cooperative and constructive tone which your support has made possible.

Finally, we offer special thanks to Vincent Ganci whose help and knowledge have been invaluable and to Robert Lansing who responded with skill and courtesy to our needs for financial and busing information.

Thanks again. Those of us most actively involved (many of whom live outside the boundary of the Rensselaerville school) are pleased to sign this report.

Sincerely,

transmittal copies signed by:

Jack Connell
Judy Connell
Dale Dorner
John Fulweiler
Nancy LaRocca
Hal Williams

ENROLLMENT FACTORS

are a good starting point. Here are our findings:

1. Enrollment of children in elementary schools across the nation is dropping. This is not due to an overall population decrease as much as to a shift in the population distribution. Currently, the sharpest population decline is in the age range 5-13. As these children grow older and become parents in fewer numbers, they, in turn, will continue to affect a lowering number of school-age children.

2. Enrollment in the Greenville Central School is following this general trend. While the population of Greene County is increasing overall, the number of children entering the school district is declining. In 1974, 1720 young people were enrolled in the district; in 1976, this total was 1600.

3. This trend affects children within the boundary of the Rensselaerville primary school as well. From an average enrollment of some 42-45 children several years ago, the total dropped to 37 in 1976.

4. Comparatively, the enrollment decline trend is more pronounced in the total district than in the area of the Rensselaerville primary school. Consider this chart:

KINDERGARTEN ENROLLMENT PROJECTIONS
based on Census figures

Year	Greenville Building	Rensselaerville Building
1976-77	82	4
1977-78	68	6
1978-79	52	4
1979-80	50	5
1980-81	34	7

These figures are based on census projections and are general estimates only. Indeed, past experience has shown that they underestimate the actual numbers when each enrollment year comes about. Also, the numbers are so small in the Rensselaerville column that a few families moving in or out could change the enrollment total in the school by 10-15%. Still, the trends, if not the precise numbers, have meaning.

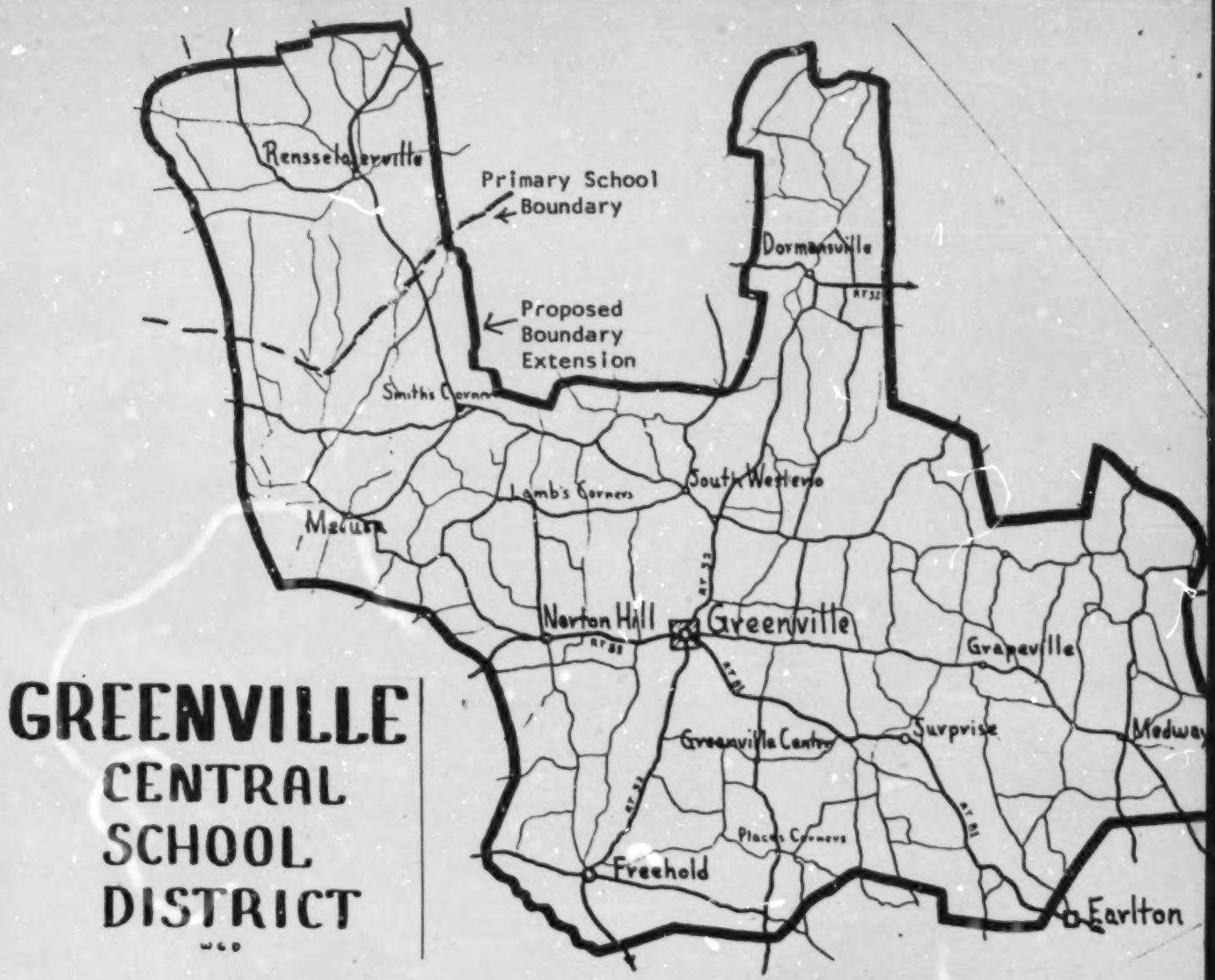
5. As the chart suggests, Rensselaerville enrollment holds stable, while that in the Greenville building declines. Thus, in 1976, Rensselaerville school contributed 4.6% of all kindergarten children. In 1980, this rises to 17%.

6. We suspect that the projected stability in enrollment for Rensselaerville will indeed hold up. Not only are some organizations in the area (such as the Institute on Man and Science) increasing staff size, but there is increasing movement in house sales to fill empty homes with young families. In 1976, there was more real estate activity in and near the village showing this trend than in the past 3 years combined.

BOUNDARIES

are another important consideration in that they affect the proportion of students within the district who attend the Rensselaerville and Greenville school buildings. Here are our findings.

1. Consider the map of the total district and the Rensselaerville primary school on the following page.



From it we draw the conclusion that if a small school is to exist within the district, it is in precisely the right spot! It catches that boundary of the district which is farthest from the central building and forms a logical small region with a "critical mass" of its own.

2. By placing the projected kindergarten enrollment families on a map, we have concluded that a boundary expansion of a few miles south, down Rt. 351 to Smith Corners, west on Rt. 357 (Rt. 357 becomes Fox Creek Road at intersection of Rt. 360) to Rt. 358, and north on Rt. 358, would bring into Rensselaerville school some 2-4 new kindergarten children each year...adding some 10-12 children to the school over its four grades. This expansion would still put those children farthest to the south almost twice as close (in linear distance) to Rensselaerville as to Greenville.

3. There appears to be no legal or historical reason why the boundary could not be changed. Indeed, no one is precisely certain where it now lies at all points, and the introduction of new children would require a case-by-case decision.

4. In suggesting the implications of a boundary change, we are, of course, not suggesting that this necessarily be done. Among the relevant factors are these:

   --feelings of parents and households boundaries would affect;
   --importance of making a commitment that children who start in a given school can finish the K-3 period there;
   --busing patterns and costs.

   Our point is simply that this is an option--a management tool available to the district to distribute children among facilities. Any boundary consideration should be in the context of a complete examination of the total district and its needs.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

while not in our judgment the only factors to be taken into account, are of obvious importance. Here are our findings:

1. Contrary to the general impression that larger schools are by nature far more economic to operate per student, the cost of educating a student in the Rensselaerville primary school is not higher than in Greenville. Indeed, when most cost categories are added (excluding transportation, supplies and a few other items), the expense of educating an elementary child in Greenville this year is about $1,340 and the cost in Rensselaerville for the same items about $1,100. (Given that the figures are partial expenses, the absolute number is not offered as the cost picture. It is the comparison which is meaningful.

2. If the enrollment increases in Rensselaerville, the cost would drop still further. Thus, at 45 students, the costs (using today's figures) would drop to about $900 per student. But, if the enrollment dropped to 30 students, the cost would rise to about $1,400 per person. Per pupil costs are very sensitive to enrollment size.

3. The above figures, furnished us by school administration, suggest that if the district needs space, the cheapest place to find it at present is in the Rensselaerville school. Fifty children each at a cost of $400 less than the costs in Greenville amount to a total savings of $20,000.

4. Rensselaerville saves money if space is needed, but can cost money if it is not. If the Rensselaerville school were closed at this point and all children bused to Greenville, the maximum cost savings to the district is also in the area of $20,000.

5. If there is a balance of needed space (for some grades) and excess space (for others), the cost savings or loss from Rensselaerville would range between a plus $20,000 and a minus $20,000. This amounts to a total of less than 1% of the district budget. Translated to the individual residential taxpayer, the amount saved or cost by the Rensselaerville school is only a few dollars per year.

6. Short-term cost or saving is no more important than the longer range financial impact. To understand those implications, we project two possible outcomes which might follow a decision to close the school based on the forecast that declining enrollments will continue.

   Alternative #1: The projection of declining enrollment proves wrong and there is a need for that space again in 10 years.

   Assume you could sell the Rensselaerville school for $25,000. To replace that space, should it be needed again, would now cost about $150,000 (based on $50 per square foot, and some 60 square feet needed per child.* In 10 years, that figure, due to inflation alone, will probably rise to over $300,000. The maximum cost savings from closing the school thus does not save enough money to pay the basic financial price of guessing wrong.

*Figures supplied as averages by the New York State Education Department.

We could say that there is little chance of guessing wrong about enrollments, but consider something else. Greenville's elementary building will not last forever. And if there is a school in Rensselaerville taking 50 students, then you can build a new school in Greenville that houses 50 fewer students... e.g., some $200,000-$300,000 cheaper, given prices in 10 years.

Alternative #2: The projection proves right, and enrollment does continue to decline.

There is a cost problem here, too, which begins with the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rensselaerville is projected to contribute a growing proportion of children to the Greenville school buildings following 3rd grade. (See chart on page 2.) If the school is discontinued, this will no longer prove true over time, as the village loses its ability to attract families with very young children who must be bused for some 3 hours per day. (Persons interviewed generally felt that they would simply not move to Rensselaerville under those conditions. Further, given orientations for jobs, goods, and services to the Albany area, they would not settle in other parts of the district either.) If this were to happen, then the total district would suffer as enrollment would drop at a more pronounced rate.

We might say that more pronounced enrollment decline is no cause for concern since our own examples suggest that education can cost less in a smaller school. But per pupil costs in the Greenville building would not go down, in our judgment, if the enrollment in the district declines for these reasons:

--the current plant, including a high school almost new, is geared to current enrollment levels. Its fixed costs, spread over fewer children, would obviously raise costs per student.

--the economies of the small Rensselaerville school in part depend upon the centralization within which it is set. Bulk purchase of supplies, administrational support, and other factors represent economies of a larger scale which the Rensselaerville school fully needs to reflect its efficient cost performance.

7. Our discussion of economics has not considered the costs of transportation in that they appear to be about equivalent for Rensselaerville and Greenville primary students. This also means that if Rensselaerville primary school students were bused to Greenville, the costs would not be increased. (If there are small differences, they are almost negated by the fact that the state now provides about 85% of the cost of busing.)

   We should note, however, one special cost of busing: on the young people themselves. Some rural Rensselaerville area students in 4th grade and above have a longer bus ride than do children from any other part of the district. Their ride is as long as 3 hours each day--more time than it takes to drive from Greenville to New York City. Although their bus time might be cut were more direct lines made possible by the elimination of the Rensselaerville school, this is far from certain. (New intermediate size buses would be required, we are told, for this net time savings to materialize, for example.)

THE TAX BASE

Some people seem to feel that the Rensselaerville area doesn't pull its share in terms of tax base. Evidence does not appear to bear that out. In terms of true value of property--the figure on which taxes are based--the total is slightly under $84,000,000 for the district and $13,850,000 for the town of Rensselaerville. Value per child in school comes to $49,822 in the town of Rensselaerville and $52,476 in the rest of the district. About the same. (When you take into account that Rensselaerville has virtually no industry, on a residence bssis, town of Rensselaerville residents may be actually contributing a bit more per household.)

We did not refine this estimate to consider the proportional tax between those in the boundary of the Rensselaervilie school and in the rest of the town. Quite frankly, we simply did not have the time.

Our projection is that the figure cited for "value per child in school" in the town would be about the same for that portion of the town within the primary school boundary as for the town as a whole. If true, this suggests that those served by the Rensslaerville primary school do handle their "fair share" of the tax burden. We base this projection on these observations:

1. Proportions of land and kids are consistent. That is, about 40% of the land within the town of Rensselaervilie is in the Rensselaerville primary school boundary and about 40% of all students in the town come from within the boundary of the primary school (122 out of 278).

2. General sense that the assessed value of a given unit of land appears equivalent for the area within and without the primary school boundary.

EDUCATIONAL VALUES

are just as important as economic ones. *Indeed, given our general sense that economic considerations for closing and/or sustaining the school are about equal at this time, we think that the net educational addition or subtraction of the Rensselaervile primary school to the district is a key factor. Here are our findings:*

1. In terms of educational performance that can readily be measured (e.g., by reading or math skill tests), there is virtually no difference between the Greenville and Rensselaerville school buildings. Any assertion that the Rensselaerville school is either better or worse at teaching basic skills is not supported by the facts.

2. While we do not feel that one school is inherently better or worse than the other, we do feel that there are important differences between the schools. A primary one is that some kinds of students tend to do better under the more "open" conditions of Rensselaerville while others do better with the more "structured" conditions of the Greenville building. In general, students whose learning and behavior readiness is high tend to blossom in the Rensselaerville school environment, while those in need of more structure are favored by the classroom environments in the Greenville building. We offer the point hesitantly, however, both because the evidence available is not strong and because the differences between the schools along the line of structure are not great. (That is, Greenville has its own "open classrooms" in the Delta program, while Rensselaerville has desks and discipline as does Greenville.)

3. Some of the differences between the primary schools has to do with teaching style and general approach--both of which can and do change over time. But many of the differences seem to be anchored in the basic concept of scale--in the relative advantages and disadvantages which both larger and smaller sized schools seem to offer.

   Following is our general analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the small school in Rensselaerville. (Although we did not do so, a similar exercise might well be conducted for the advantages and disadvantages of a larger school such as the Greenville elementary building.)

   Some Advantages of the Very Small School:

   a) Individualization of instruction, a general commitment, and trend district-wide is probably easier in a smaller school. There is less need to use standardized procedures to manage the classroom.

   b) It is probably easier to experiment in smaller schools, and to assess the effects of different educational materials and curricula and approaches. The Rensselaerville primary school has indeed been a pilot for the district as a whole. An example is the SARI reading program (with all those bubbles) where experience in Rensselaerville pointed the way.

c) Children learn things in school beyond the subject matter. In a small school, a child can gain a sense of belonging, mastery over a manageably-sized environment, and community roots. Further, older children learn a great deal in the process of teaching younger ones. (How many of us remember all the facts and figures we learned in 2nd grade? But who has not had his or her character profoundly influenced by the educational experiences of childhood?)

d) Easier communication among administration, teachers, and parents is probably promoted by a smaller school and the atmosphere it makes possible. In larger schools, we must invent mechanisms that are more naturally available in smaller schools.

e) The lack of so many teaching aides in a small school can encourage an inventiveness and resourcefulness that the ready presence of those aides may discourage. Thus, children in the school learn how to fabricate or even to imagine the things they need to make learning possible.

Some Disadvantages of the Very Small School:

a) There is less chance to provide specialized help in subject areas and for students with special needs. This fact has been critical in the closing of many small high schools where the little school cannot offer the options many citizens feel are essential to a good education.

b) There is probably some tendency for smallness to become staleness. Teachers see the same families through children and perhaps even through generations. Diversity and freshness made possible by a larger mix of people and interactions is very limited.

c) Sometimes the impersonalness of a larger school can be an advantage in being a buffer against sharp personal reactions. In the small school, there is virtually nothing which stands between a teacher and parent, for example, and issues and emotions get personalized very quickly.

d) Smallness in education is not well recognized or supported by state and federal agencies, which continue to press for consolidation and regionalization as "progressive" steps. While many of the assumptions may be inaccurate (e.g., that a larger school is always cheaper per child), they are still widely held. *To the point that in New York State only six one- or two-room school houses have been built since 1950. The Rensselaerville primary school is one of them.*

e) A smaller school means there is less of a resource pool among children. In a school where older children may have to help younger ones, there can be great fluctuations in the abilities of a given small class to do that.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

of the little school is a subject directly related to educational values. Indeed, the themes are interdependent, we have found.

1. The village of Rensselaerville is clearly a significant resource to the school. For example, the library furnishes books on year-long loan. More importantly, its librarian and staff go out of their way to help children who wish to look things up after school. Also, an outreach program delivers books to pre-school children in the area to help build learning readiness.

   More broadly, the Huyck Preserve, Historical Society, Institute on Man and Science and all other groups and organizations in the area serve as help upon request. (For confirming letters of this practice, please see Attachment #1 to this report.)

   Finally, individuals--parents of children and other townspeople and area residents--come to the school to share experiences, explain their jobs, and help out in other ways.

   The key to this interaction lies with teachers who are receptive to and skilled in using community resources to enrich the schoolroom. While we have purposely steered clear in our inquiry of any assessment of the teaching or learning job done in the school at any given point in time, we must here record our admiration for Betty Lockwood and Mary Ann Ransom for their encouragement and use of community resources, as well as their educational philosphy of learning based upon exploration and problem solving.

2. Beyond enriching school life, local resources can save money. For example, the use of volunteer teachers this year for art, music, and gym not only assures students these services without a long bus ride, but also saves $2,400 per year--a direct cost savings of $61 per student! We offer this not to suggest it as a continuing practice but as an illustration of the willingness of community residents to help when help is needed.

3. It is useful to note that the interactions of the community with the school help specifically to offset the disadvantages we have noted as inherent in the very small school. That is, they add specialized resources, increase interactions, and broaden the mix of those involved, provide a slightly bigger sense of structure, add legitimacy to the very small scale, and add to the resource base. Without community involvement, we suspect that the general drawbacks of the very small school would be much more pronounced in Rensselaerville.

4. The values go both ways. If the community is a very important resource to the school, the school is certainly a critical resource to the village. In fact, it is the one widely-shared institution which the village has. It helps to retain families and to provide an affirmative sense of a high quality of life and village integrity.

   The point of stating that the school and village recognize interdependence is to underscore the viability and longevity of this relationship. There is something in it for everyone.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

adds meaning to the discussion as a final point. This short narrative was drafted by Ken Storms, Executive Director of the Rensselaerville Historical Society, an organization with over 400 members in Rensselaerville, Medusa, Potter Hollow, Greenville, and other villages.

Note, especially, the point made about the partnership concept inherent in the transition of the Rensselaerville primary school to a part of the Greenville Central School.

The story of the Rensselaerville primary school goes back as far as the history of the village itself. We know that in 1793, there was a little log schoolhouse in the settlement on the hill southwest of the village near what is now the Kropp farm. The first clergyman, Mr. Samuel Fuller, a graduate of Dartmouth University, taught there as well as caring for his parish. Later, in 1805, as the village began to grow, the school was moved to a point nearer its present location, and Miss Patty Pond opened the new school house before it had a floor or a stove, and taught in it "three hours daily by the hour-glass."

Twenty-five years later, this old school, which had achieved a reputation not only as a school but as a center of many community activities, was abandoned. A new brick school house had been erected in the village. This building, standing next to the Episcopal Church, is in use today as a private residence. Here, from 1830 until 1900 the public school flourished, at which time it was moved into the old Rensselaerville Academy building. This building, originally erected as a church in the settlement near the Kropp farm in 1795, was dismantled and moved by ox team to the site of the present elementary school in 1815.

It continued in use as a Presbyterian church until the erection of the present church building on the village street in 1843. The abandoned church was then altered internally and equipped as a school under the leadership of the Rev. Marcus Smith and a board of trustees. This was the Rensselaerville Academy, which continued as a private school until 1898. Since 1900, public education has continued at the present site both in the old Academy building and in the new elementary school built in 1955.

When the district of Rensselaerville merged with the Greenville school district, it was the understanding of both parties that, although students of the upper grades would be transported to the Greenville school, a school would be maintained in Rensselaerville for those students in the lower grades. Thus, this action was less that of a formal consolidation and more of a partnership in which two small regions agreed to cooperate for their common good. Since this agreement, the grade level at the Rensselaerville school has been gradually reduced to the present kindergarten through third grade level. But the "gentlemen's agreement" has been upheld.

In recent years there has been a great deal of community involvement with the Rensselaerville school. Many village residents have visited the school and shared their interests and their knowledge with the children there. Also, the students regularly visit the businesses and institutions of the village, and learn how they function. The Rensselaerville school has become not only a place where children go to learn, but a place where they will meet their community and discover their role in it. This, I believe, is worth preserving.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the merger of the Rensselaerville school with the Greenville Central District, the question of the school's future has arisen many times. The fact that the origin of concern is more often rumor than fact does not lessen the negative consequences of that concern and the high feelings which it brings.

Our recommendations are designed to replace the present undesirable climate of uncertainty with a more stable kind of understanding and cooperation. They hinge not upon a once-and-final decision (which is obviously not possible), but rather upon agreement to a procedure--the steps that will be followed and the issues which will be addressed prior to any decision about the school's future.

To assist the School Board, the following guidelines are offered as an example of a procedure that would seem appropriate and sufficient.

A. On-Going Assumption

That in the absence of any notice to the contrary, concerned citizens may rest assured no real consideration, formal or informal, has been given to closing or changing the status of the Rensselaerville primary school, that Board members as a group continue to treat the school as an important and valued part of the District's operation.

To amplify this assumption, we ask that the Board of Education provide a reaction to this report and, in particular, the statements and propositions underlined in blue. This will give us a good sense of your present feelings about the school. It would be useful to know not only of the degree of support the School Board now has but also the reasons for that support. Frankly, this would help put responsibility on all of us concerned with the school to help insure that the present conditions which you find attractive are sustained.

B. Notice of School Re-Assessment

That if and when the Board of Education has determined that the school's future must be re-evaluated, notice be given and widely publicized to this effect --stating time and place of a public meeting to consider the matter. Communication would also take place with present or suc-

cessive members of the Ad-Hoc Committee which developed this report, and a cooperative task team of School Board, Administration, and Ad-Hoc Committee members formed. This team, whose citizen members obviously have only informal and advisory status, would then be the group clearly charged with developing and evaluating evidence and recommending a decision to the full Board of Education.

We stress that this step should take place while the school's future is an open question, not after a decision has been reached which needs justification and acceptance.

C. Public Meeting

That at the meeting announced, the task team formed should present a framework of information. If possible, specific options should be spelled out (from keeping the school "as is" to closing it entirely to in-between steps of school operation in modified form). Costs and benefits, both short and long term, for each option should be noted. Information presented should update the facts and impressions presented in this report, taking into account but not be limited to:

1. Enrollment. Show statistics for comparative enrollment in the whole district and the two elementary buildings for the past five years and future five years. Indicate what impact these figures have on both school buildings.

2. Boundaries. Thoroughly explore the possibility of an extended boundary indicating where for a projected five-year period there may be "new" students available for the Rensselaerville building, feasible bus routes, travel time involved, and a cost comparison for sending these youngsters to Rensselaerville vs. sending them to Greenville.

3. Economic Factors. Present the breakdown of the cost of the Rensselaerville school, the cost per pupil in Rensselaerville and the comparative cost per pupil in Greenville. Also show the net savings or cost projected, short-term and long-term, for keeping the school open as is.

4. Educational Values. Anticipate effects that any readjustment to the Rensselaerville school may have on the educational quality of the school district as a whole, with the particular attention to the advantages and disadvantages of different scales lost on guiding any change.

5. Community Factors. Make a statement on the economic and community effects on the community of Rensselaerville of present school operation under alternative proposals.

D. Decision-Framework and a Decision

Based upon reactions at the meeting and future considerations, the task team will next define the decision-framework--the kinds of specific conditions (e.g., enrollment levels, economic performance, etc.) which would have to prevail in order to make each of the options the most acceptable one. Then, and only then, should a tentative decision be reached on the grounds of which option seems favored by conditions which then exist.

Before a decision is made final, everyone should have an opportunity to suggest ways in which those present conditions might be changed to better favor another alternative. For example, if the option of closing seems favored by a specific dollar sum which could be saved both short and long term by closure, people should have the opportunity to present a plan for how that condition might change, either through increasing revenues (e.g., through local or foundation support) or decreasing costs further (e.g., by in-kind services provided by local residents).

Once the opportunities to change existing conditions are thoroughly evaluated, a final or provisional decision is reached.

Given that everyone in the task team has been fully involved, we suggest that the team at least attempt to get a consensus agreement. The Board then votes or decides, based largely on the facts and conclusions drawn by the group.

E. Announcement of Decision

The decisions reached will next be publicly announced with full justification available upon request. Individuals not satisfied with the decision could then pursue other courses they deem appropriate.

We stress that these follow-up actions would be individual ones, and not a formal part of this process. We tend to feel that a petition letter or media campaign or other such steps, especially if done hastily, might favor rhetoric more than reason.

F. Other Guidelines

1. That any decision made about the school consider, first and foremost, the children involved. Thus, any action involving a displacement of children from one school to another during the kindergarten-3rd grades should be very carefully weighed.

2. That the issue of the school's future not be confused with the issue of the budget. While the school obviously involves economic factors, it involves many other considerations as well. Thus, we recommend that the Board agree that this procedure not be initiated coincidentally with budget preparation and approval.

MORE IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are as much a by-product of our committee inquiry as a direct response to our mission. They are thoughts which might help to strengthen the present operation of the Rensselaerville primary school, as well as anticipate future changes.

1. That the Board seriously investigate changing the enrollment boundaries for the Rensselaerville school building. To the extent that the present boundary does not reflect a planned management decision at all, it would seem that a good examination of other possibilities is in order.

2. That the Board consider approaches which might make use of a strong but unused potential of the Rensselaerville primary school--its role as an alternative. If our report is accurate in suggesting that certain kinds of students do better in one kind of school than the other, then some strategy that could give students, families, and the school a choice (which no one presently has)

would seem useful. We realize that the logistical and transportation problems are not easy--and also that the students numbers in Rensselaerville could just as easily decrease as increase through an open-enrollment policy.

Still, if the district is really committed to individualization of instruction, the "fit" between student and alternative educational setting would seem an important first step.

In suggesting this inquiry, we do have one clear reservation: Any voluntary transportation system by parents biases against families where all adults work and against those with lower incomes (e.g., with no second car available for transporting children). Equality of opportunity is no more important than equality of ability to take advantage of opportunity.

3. That the School Board and our Ad-Hoc Committee consider forming a mechanism for continuing communication between the teachers at the school and community residents. This would be a local equivalent to the P.T.A. but more fitting to the community-based aspect of the primary school. (By this recommendation we do not suggest that parents have more "say" in running the school--merely more opportunity to interact and to help.)

4. That teachers should have the option of periodic rotation in and out of the school. We earlier suggested (page 11) that characteristics inherent in such a small scale may make circulation desirable. If this is done, we suggest a phased rotation, leaving one experienced teacher to help in the transition at all times.

5. *Consider appointing persons or small citizen groups to investigate on a continuing basis:*

   a) ways to cut costs through use of community resources and volunteers;

   b) ways to get additional revenues (e.g., through foundation gifts, curriculum development grants, etc.)

6. Consider a mechanism for better strengthening the interrelationship between the Greenville and Rensselaerville buildings. For teachers, parents, perhaps even children, more mutual understanding of what happens in the other school could eliminate the slight and very rational tendency toward separateness.

7. Consider the creation of a general program/policy statement for the Rensselaerville primary school's operation which would provide continuity from teacher to teacher. Such a statement begins with the recognition that some assumptions, opportunities and constraints in the primary school are different from conditions in Greenville, calling for some individualization of the basic structure of the school's operation.

ATTACHMENT # 1:

Support Letters from Community Organizations

Rensselaerville Historical Society

Rensselaerville, New York 12147

February 7, 1977

At the regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Rensselaerville Historical Society, the following resolution was adopted:

The Rensselaerville Historical Society supports the continued operation of the Rensselaerville School.

Historically the village of Rensselaerville has always provided good education for its children. The present school has continued that tradition.

Because their school is in Rensselaerville, students have been able to take advantage of the facilities of local organizations such as the E.N. Huyck Preserve and the Institute On Man and Science. In the coming year, the Rensselaerville Historical Society hopes to join these groups in serving our local school. This spring the Historical Society will be completing the restoration of its Grist Mill Museum. Only two hundred yards from the school, this facility will be available to the students on a regular basis for programs and workshops.

The people of Rensselaerville are proud of the tradition of their cultural institutions. Many organizations, both public and private, have expressed their support for the continued operation of our local school.

The Board of Directors, acting on behalf of the membership, urges the Board of Education to help us to carry on the good work of the Rensselaerville School.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary Smith

Mary Smith, Sec.

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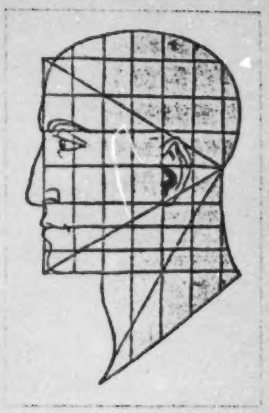

THE INSTITUTE ON MAN AND SCIENCE / RENSSELAERVILLE, NEW YORK 12147 / (518) 797-3783

Board of Education
Greenville Central School
Greenville, New York 12083

Dear People:

I write to express the support of our organization to the concept of a small village school in Rensselaerville. Our own work in small community revitalization has helped to underscore just how important to a community are such institutions as a local school.

The Institute has been pleased to be of help to the Rensselaerville school in the past. This has included material needs (such as the new carpet we provided for one of the two large classrooms) and learning resource support (such as the annual visit to our campus by all students).

In addition, our policy is to fully encourage all staff who wish to spend time working with the school. We view this as part of our own educational mandate. And our facilities and equipment is always available to the school, as to other groups in the area.

If we can ever be of more help, I trust you will let us know.

Sincerely,

Harold S. Williams

Harold S. Williams
President

HSW:hb

February 15, 1977

The Rensselaerville Library
Rensselaerville, New York 12147

The School Board of the Greenville Central School System
Greenville, New York

Dear Sirs:

The members of the Board of Trustees of the Rensselaerville Library wish to affirm, at this point, their support of the continued existence of the Rensselaerville Primary School.

The teachers in this school have communicated to the children and the adults in this community the fact that school can be enjoyable as well as educationally stimulating. Getting along well with one's neighbor has been taught along with basic principles of reading, numbers, science, social studies and art. The children, in short, have learned that school is fun.

As another institution committed to the education of children the Rensselaerville Library has, through the years, enthusiastically cooperated with the Primary School. Children have come in groups from the school to visit the library and learn how to use it. Each September approximately three hundred childrens' books are lent to the school for circulation purposes; and the library provides space and exposure for childrens' projects. Furthermore, the library, in its pre-school door-to-door book delivery program demonstrates its recognition of the need for early exposure to reading and quality education that the primary school so effectively embodies.

Should the Greenville Central School System decide to close the doors of the Rensselaerville Primary School, the loss to the community and to quality public education would be immense.

Yours very truly,

Zita Eastman

Zita Eastman, Chairman
The Board of Trustees
of the Rensselaerville
Library

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The Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve, Inc.

RENSSELAERVILLE
ALBANY COUNTY, NEW YORK
12147

February 22, 1977

Board of Education
Greenville Central School District
Greenville, New York 12083

Dear Members of the Board:

I wish to lend my personal support, and identify the support of The Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve, Inc. for the Rensselaerville Primary School of the Greenville Central School District.

The Huyck Preserve was established in 1931 for the purposes of Conservation, Research, and Education. It has, since that time, supported the Rensselaerville School by contributing land, equipment, prizes and scholarships.

Approximately half of the land on which the Primary School is now located was given, on the Preserve's initiative, to Rural School District Number One in 1954. The Preserve, since its establishment, has from time to time contributed books, equipment and supplies which teachers have identified as being otherwise unavailable.

From 1931 to 1967, annual awards were contributed for science projects undertaken by students of the School. A Junion Audubon Club was established at the School in 1958, under the Preserve's sponsorship, and continued until 1967. A tuition-free nature study class was established in 1958 to extend the Audubon program into the summer. This program continues to attract as many as thirty students per year.

Beginning in 1961, Huyck Scholarships of two thousand dollars per academic year were made available to graduates of Greenville who needed financial assistance to attend college. These scholarships were terminated in 1969, as a result of lack of applications from deserving students of the Greenville Central School. In addition, and like many other residents of Rensselaerville, scientists visiting the Preserve and I have given guest lectures at the Primary School.

The Huyck Preserve is an educational institution, and assists many other school districts of the Capital region by hosting field trips and providing guest lectures and exhibits in the natural sciences. Courses offered by Union and Skidmore Colleges are conducted on the Preserve during the summer months, and are open to all college students of the Capital district. Also, for the past three years, high school students from throughout the country have spent three to four weeks in residence, assisting and studying under the guidance of visiting scientists. Last year, scholarships, supported in part by the Preserve, permitted fifteen high school students to participate in this program. In recognition for the success of this program, the Preserve has received a letter of commendation from the United States Office of Education, Programs for the Gifted. The availability of this opportunity has been brought to the attention of the administration of Greenville School.

It is my hope, and I am sure the hope of the majority of the Board of Directors of The Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve, that the Rensselaerville Primary School will remain open. It would be regrettable that a community known and admired, almost since its founding for its educational opportunities and diversity, should lose its school. The hamlet of Rensselaerville has many professionals, including educators, who have expressed a willingness to assist and augment the educational program of the District. These persons are very much aware of educational trends and needs, and represent strong supporters of education.

The closing of the Rensselaerville Primary School for the lack of enrollment or support within the District could be a self fulfilling prophecy. The loss of the Primary School will discourage young families from either moving to or continuing to reside in the District. The loss may be further compounded, should additional families send their children to private schools, and join others in trying to reduce school programs and budgets. I trust the Board will consider these, and I believe many other, valid arguments, in keeping the School open, and offset its cost with a greater utilization of local volunteer support.

Sincerely yours,

Robert C. Dalgleish
Executive Director

RCD:sah

cc: Executive Committee, The Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve, Inc.

The Rensselaerville Democratic Social Club

February 24, 1977

To: Board of Education
Greenville Central School District

In view of recent discussions surrounding the future of the Rensselaerville School, the enclosed resolution was unanimously adopted at our February meeting, held in Medusa.

The Social Club with well over one hundred members stands willing and able to lend volunteer support services upon request of the Board.

We hope you will give our resolution most serious consideration in the deliberation and decision-making process regarding the school.

Sincerely,

Gerard A. Finin
President

Enc.

The Rensselaerville Democratic Social Club

RESOLUTION #1 of 1977

To: The Greenville Central School Board

Whereas the Rensselaerville Primary School of the Greenville Central School District is of great educational value and benefit to those in attendance, and

Whereas the aforementioned school provides unique services to the community and its institutions, and

Whereas the aforementioned school allows young children in grades kindergarten thru third to avoid long, time-consuming bus rides,

Therefore, be it resolved on this 15th day of February, 1977, that the Town of Rensselaerville Democratic Social Club hereby supports the continued operation and maintenance of this outstanding school named herein.

Passed 2/16/77
Medusa, New York

ATTACHMENT # 2:

Some Comments by Residents

...I visited the school before we came and it was one of the reasons we moved to Rensselaerville. My children have nothing but good experiences at that school. They enjoy getting up in the morning and going to school every day. They learn very well. They also learn, it seems to me, how to get along well with other children.

...I think it's unthinkable that it could ever go out of the community. I can't imagine how children of 5, 6, and 7 can be expected to travel on a bus three hours each day.

...In four more years, my son will be old enough to go there...I just hope it's still there for him to go to.

...Being a newcomer to Rensselaerville, it came as a nice surprise to see a small school still operating. I think it's a good quality of education.

...I think it's a good thing. Smaller school; smaller group of people. Learn more. Easier situation to learn in.

...It allows the total school district to have a healthy comparison available of teaching methods and learning methods and also allows for the development of the children in the local community.

...From my point of view, as important as the academics are--reading and writing--I think that the uniqueness of the Rensselaerville school in creating an atmosphere which stimulates and motivates learning.

...It is not so much the negative part of children being bused but more the positive things--children walking to school obviously happy...listening to children at recess time laughing--having a good time.

...They went out and tapped the maple tree last year. Parents came in and helped make and use the syrup in cooking and they remember that. And then they wrote it up in the newspaper.

...A feeling that this is our school, that we have an input, can have an input.

...You've got all these little kids. Instead of teaching them to fight in school, they know each other, get along well. They learn respect for their town and they have a sense of community. Too many kids these days don't have a sense of community.

...A sense of community. That's what they're learning in the little school.

(Note: a tape recording containing these and more verbatim conversations as recorded on Rensselaerville's main street is available upon request.)

ATTACHMENT # 3:

Correspondence and meeting minutes

R. D. 1 Box 150
Greenville, New York 12083
October 13, 1976

Mr. Vincent L. Ganci
Superintendent
Greenville Central School
Greenville, New York 12083

Dear Mr. Ganci:

My wife and I, as well as several friends and acquaintances with children approaching Kindergarten age, have become quite concerned over the very large numbers of students in the Kindergarten Classes at the Greenville Elementary School.

I believe that currently there are in excess of 25 children in each of the three Kindergarten classes. I also understand that the Rensselaerville Elementary School Kindergarten Class has a greatly reduced number of children, I believe 4 or 5 students, and that this school is being considered for phasing out within the next year.

We have been impressed with the Rensselaerville School, its size, its location, its quality of teaching. We, therefore, would like to have included on the October 18, 1976 School Board Meeting Agenda, a discussion of the possibility of expanding the geographic area in which the Rensselaerville Elementary School can draw its student body.

Thank you.

Sincerel yours,

JOHN J. CONNELL

JJC/cc

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Deep Pond Farm

Rensselaerville, New York 12147

November 19, 1976

MEMORANDUM

TO: Persons attending the first meeting of the Committee to Consider the Future of the Rensselaerville Primary School, held Nov. 16, 1976

John Connell
John Fulweiler
Vincent Ganci
Nancy La Rocca
Robert Lansing
David Stoddard
John Story
Hal Williams

FROM: Hal Williams, Acting Scribe HW

Lady and Gentlemen:

Here is the meeting as I heard it. Do let me know if the record needs additions or corrections. This is a rough draft and I welcome your thoughts for improvement.

I heard us draw some conclusions, define some questions, and raise some general points. Here they are.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN

1) That the Committee is an ad hoc group to consider the future of the Rensselaerville School. And other topics of concern should either await the completion of this topic or find alternative means of expression.

2) That the general objectives of the Committee are to:

--set forth the full range of considerations which should be taken into account before determining the future of the school at any point;

--try to ask and answer questions of fact which seem to bear on these considerations;

--generate a range of conceivable alternatives that seem to exist for the school and the future conditions that might lead the Board of Education to take action in one direction or another;

--work with the Board in moving toward a written statement of general policy which looks to the future and anticipates future conditions, rather than reacting to past and present ones. General and not rigid guidelines are sought.

3) That to gain legitimacy for its viewpoint, the Committee should be broadly representative of the district as a whole. (It was noted that the first meeting is a good starting point in that over half of the residents do not live within the present Rensselaerville School boundaries.)

4) That the spirit of the group is one of cooperation in which Mr. Ganci and others from Administration serve as resource participants to the group. The total effort is based upon the understanding of declining enrollment trends in both Rensselaerville and the district as a whole. All of us concerned about education need to spell out as clearly as possible the rationale, advantages and disadvantages to keeping open the Rensselaerville School under a variety of conditions which might come to be.

5) That the timetable is to have another meeting in about three weeks in which the same small group comes together to deal with answers to questions generated. That the group then noticeably enlarge itself before interpretations or conclusions are drawn. That this enlargement effort should be formal to the point of a newspaper article and advertisement, thus going on record that anyone who wishes to be part of the inquiry has a clear opportunity.

6) That Jack Connell be appointed as ad-hoc-chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee with Hal Williams acting scribeperson.

KEY QUESTIONS DEFINED

1) Economic

a) What does it cost to educate a child, K-3, in Rensselaerville and in Greenville under conditions of A) full enrollment, B) present enrollment, and C) enrollment 10% less than present levels?

b) What would it cost per pupil to educate K-3 students presently in the Rensselaerville boundary in Greenville?

c) What would it cost to educate children, per capita, who are presently in the Greenville area in the Rensselaerville School?

d) What are the population projections for elementary and secondary students and with what accuracy are they made for the next 10 years?

e) What are the projections for the tax base within the school district over a similar period?

f) What, if anything, can be said about the proportion of education to be borne through state aid and transfer payments in the next 10 years?

2) Physical Plant

a) How big is the school and how much did it cost to construct?

b) What residual rights, if any, does the Huyck Preserve hold on the school or its land if it were closed?

c) What is the difference between present market value and replacement cost of the school?

d) What is the present boundary for the Rensselaerville School?

e) If the boundaries were changed to attract another 15 students to Rensselaerville on the sole basis of least expensive transportation cost (given present routes), what would the new boundary look like?

f) If the present boundaries were changed to attract some 15 additional students on the basis of expanding the boundary evenly its entire length, how far would the boundary line be "pushed out" from the old line?

3) Educational Considerations

a) What can be said about the differences in educational operation between Rensselaerville and Greenville and about what kinds of students might tend to do better in one or the other setting?

b) To what extent are those differences related to the small scale of the Rensselaerville operation?

c) Is there any way to judge the comparative performance in terms of student learning in Rensselaerville and in Greenville without forcing either school to be measured on indicators that it is not best set up to achieve?

d) What do we know about parent attitudes toward the relative values of the school? For example, if there were a completely open enrollment policy, how many Rensselaerville parents do we think would choose to send their children to Greenville and vice versa? (Assuming transportation provided by the school.)

e) Given open enrollment but no transportation provided from Greenville to Rensselaerville or vice versa, how many parents would feel strongly enough to furnish transportation.

4) Logistics

a) If the school were to be closed, what would be the process for doing so? In particular, what are the legal requirements on the school board?

4) Logistics

b) What would happen to the building in Rensselaerville? If the school is closed, does the Board have to sell it? Would it?

c) There is a comparison example of the small school in Westerlo maintained within the Berne-Knox School District. This district has followed a policy of strengthening and even expanding the Westerlo School over the past several years. What is the experience there and what can we learn from it?

5) Relationship of School to Community

a) How important is the school to the residents of Rensselaerville?

b) What is the distribution of attitudes toward the school among A) parents and B) all others in the community and immediate area?

c) If the school is seen as valuable, what are residents or Rensselaerville institutions (e.g., library, Institute on Man and Science, Huyck Preserve, etc.) willing to do to help keep the school open?

d) What is likely to happen to population level or composition in Rensselaerville if the school were closed? (Any changes in the community as a result of the school closing would, of course, end up affecting the Greenville School quite directly!)

e) Are there any ways to make the school more a community organization as well as a part of the Greenville Central School? Could the school, given more of a community orientation, qualify for any grants or experimental funds given the current stress upon decentralization in small-scale schools?

GENERAL POINTS RAISED

1. If at all possible, this committee should help to break down current bad feelings between Rensselaerville and other parts of the district. At the very least, it must not intensify them.

2. Any change in boundaries or enrollment in Rensselaerville School that included the provision for parent transportation of children must recognize that this bias is against lower income households which may not have an extra car or the luxury of time spent in transporting.

3. We must bear in mind at all times that the children are the "bottom line" of discussion. Thus, for example, a decision made to send kindergarteners presently outside the district to Rensselaerville might face the need to make a 2-4 year commitment so that children are not yanked from school to school indiscriminately.

4. In looking at the Rensselaerville school as a problem to be dealt with, we should also recognize the possibility for new potentials. An example:

> Even if we cannot say or do not wish to make a judgment about whether the Rensselaerville School is better or worse educationally than Greenville, we may well find it easier to suggest that the schools are quite different and that different children tend to do better in one learning environment or the other. If this is true, then perhaps the greatest value of having the Rensselaerville School is that it is an alternative. But... that value is presently not useful to anybody in that nobody really has a choice at present.

5. There was a recognition that some of our questions, although factual in nature, will be very difficult to answer precisely. Thus, the issue of what it costs to educate a child in Rensselaerville, given the fact that central costs are not distinguished by Rensselaerville or Greenville plants, will be difficult. We agree that we would do our best and accept reasonable figures.

6. It was noted that the teachers should clearly have a voice in the deliberations and be asked for their ideas and feelings, especially on the advantages and disadvantages of this special setting.

R. D. 1
Box 150
Greenville, New York 12083
January 17, 1977

Mr. Vincent Ganci
Supervising Principal
Greenville Central School
Greenville, New York 12083

Dear Vince:

I trust the flu season hasn't made a personal visit to you as it seems to with everyone else. I have the notice regarding the February 8th meeting to include in the next School Lunch Program schedule. It is as follows:

OPEN MEETING - GREENVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT

When: 7 p.m., February 8, 1977
Where: Greenville Elementary School Library
Subject: The Future of Education in the Rensselaerville Elementary School

Everyone is welcome.

With your approval, I will send a similar notice in a week or so to the Knickerbocker News and the Greenville Local and have the bills sent to your business office.

Take care, see you on the 8th.

Sincerely yours,

JOHN J. CONNELL

JJC/cc

R.D. 1
Box 150
Greenville, New York 12083
January 25, 1977

Dear Rensselaerville Area Resident:

On Tuesday night, February 8, an open meeting will be held in Greenville on the future of the Rensselaerville school. Announcements will soon appear.

The purpose of the meeting is to explore all possible factors which bear on the school's economics and enrollment (which is now declining); educational values (e.g., of a "two-room schoolhouse"); physical factors and relationship of the school to both the total district and the Village of Rensselaerville.

A small group of us concerned about the future of the school met with the administration and the school board and gathered some facts and figures on the subject. Before presenting these at the open meeting in February (which will include people from Greenville, Medusa, and all other parts of the district), we would like to share our findings with those who live in and near Rensselaerville. To do this, we have scheduled a meeting for 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 2, in the basement of Conkling Hall. The purpose of this meeting is to inform you of our study, get your reactions, and generate a broader base of concern.

Following the district-wide February meeting, we hope to suggest citizen concerns to the Board of Education and to urge that it develop a formal policy on the procedure it would use should declining enrollment force a reconsideration of the status of the Rensselaerville school.

The school administration and Board of Education, incidentally, have been very supportive of our efforts. This is a cooperative inquiry in which all viewpoints are welcome.

I hope you can join with us on the 2nd for an hour of informal discussion in Conkling Hall.

Sincerely,

John J. Connell
Chairman, Ad-Hoc Committee for the Future
of the Rensselaerville School

P.S. I was asked by some Rensselaerville people to act as Chairman of the group because I do <u>not</u> live in Rensselaerville and am <u>not</u> seen as solely concerned with its interests. We think it particularly important that we all know what factors the Board would take into account in such a reconsideration.